



Approved For Release 2003/08/18 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100024-3

Foreign  
Assessment  
Center

25X1

CT- 25X1

25X1

# Iran: Some Implications of the Azarbayjani Disturbances

An Intelligence Memorandum

25X1

PA 79-10587C  
SC 00534/79  
December 1979

Approved For Release 2003/08/18 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100024-3

Copy

**Warning Notice**

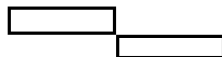
Intelligence Sources  
and Methods Involved  
(WNINTEL)

**National Security  
Information**

Unauthorized Disclosure  
Subject to Criminal Sanctions

Dissemination Control  
Abbreviations

25X1A  
25X1A



25X1

25X1

**Iran: Some Implications  
of the Azarbayjani  
Disturbances (U)**

**Summary**

The recent disturbances in Tabriz and other Azarbayjani-populated areas of northwest Iran and the confrontation between Ayatollahs Khomeini and Shariat-Madari do not represent an imminent threat to Khomeini's dominance of the Iranian political scene.

The key issue, however—Azari demands for autonomy—echoes appeals from other minorities and raises the possibility of simultaneous or coordinated disturbances by dissident minority groups that could arouse the entire northwest.<sup>1</sup> This is where some of Iran's most fertile agricultural areas and its major rail and road links with Europe and the USSR are located.

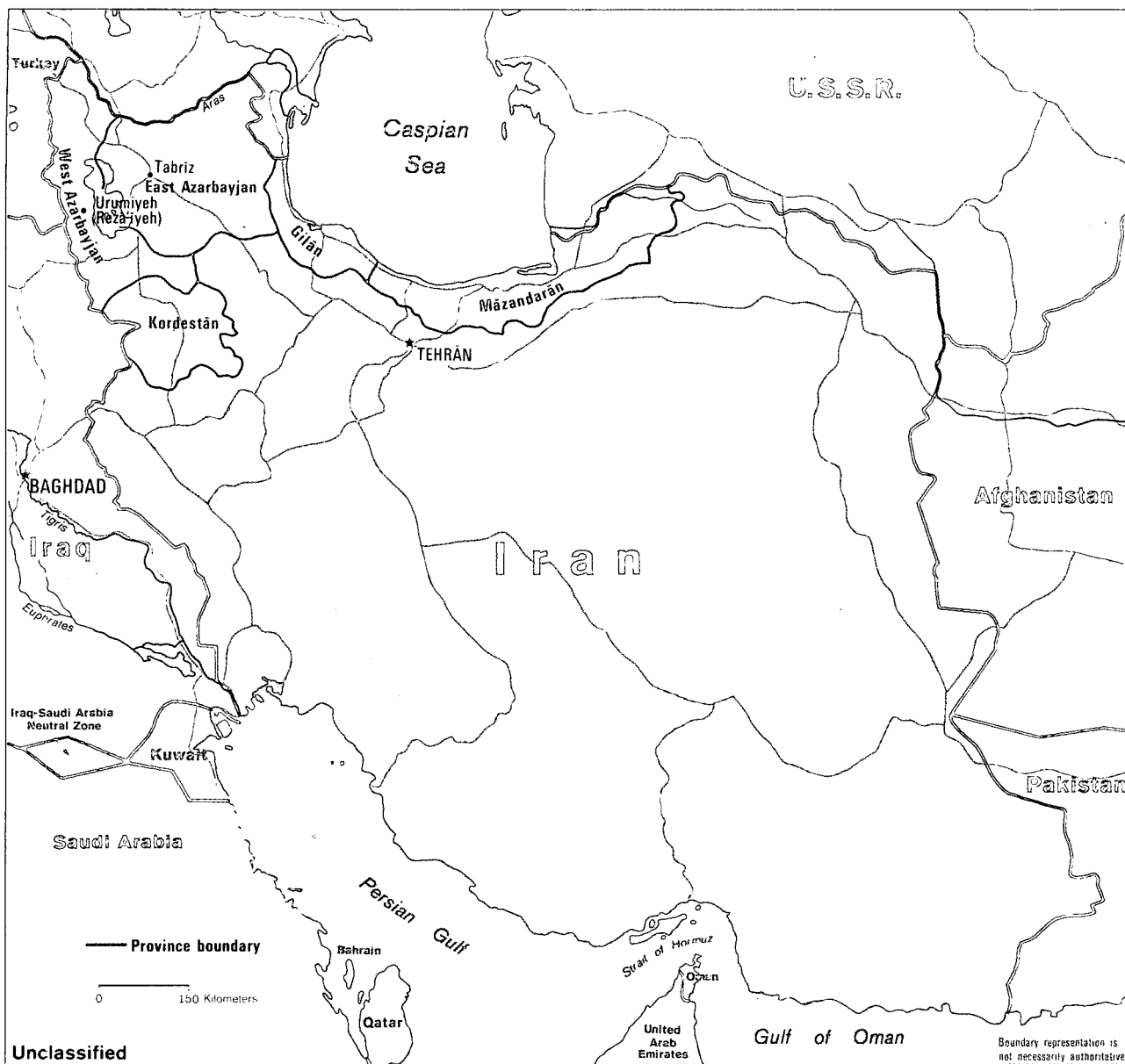
<sup>1</sup> Various estimates number from 5 to 14 million, the Azaris are Iran's largest minority. They occupy areas in the northwest from the Soviet border to the latitude of Tehran, living between and among the Kurds, Turkomans, and other smaller tribes. There are also significant Azari enclaves in urban areas throughout Iran, and their representation among the military, bureaucracy, and commercial classes is disproportionately high. They are the only major Iranian minority whose society is not tribally organized. (U)

*The above information is Confidential.*

*This memorandum was prepared by [ ] of the Iran Task Force, Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia. Information available as of 11 December 1979 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to the Chief, Iran Task Force, [ ] (U)*

25X1A

25X1A



626135 12-79

**Iran: Some Implications  
of the Azarbayjani  
Disturbances (U)**

*Azaris and Kurds*

An unidentified Kurdish delegation went to Tabriz last week to indicate Kurdish solidarity with the Azarbayjani demonstrators and their demands for autonomy. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) later published a statement of support for the Azari dissidents, and "a large group" of Kurdish supporters and leftists in Tehran reportedly demonstrated on 8 December. On the same day an Army unit commander in northern Kordestan Province reported that about 2,000 leftists and Kurds had left to join demonstrations in Tabriz and other Azarbayjani cities, while another unit reported that Azaris had come to Kordestan to buy weapons. KDP members apparently did not join in a 10 December clash between Khomeini and Shariat-Madari supporters in Urumiyeh, the capital of West Azarbayjan, which has been the scene of Kurdish anti-Khomeini clashes. (TS U)

There have been reports in the area of Sunni-Shia conflicts—probably Kurd versus Azari—over land and water rights and political activities. But the KDP is taking pains not to irritate its Azari neighbors and, according to a US Embassy official who visited Tabriz this fall, it is receiving Azari sympathy in return. The KDP has tried to blur its territorial claims in areas of mixed population and says it supports Azari autonomy. Dissident Kurds apparently have tried to identify Azarbayjanis among the Revolutionary Guards—the favorite Kurdish target—and have then treated them relatively well. The Kurdish leaders also take a positive attitude toward Ayatollah Shariat-Madari and say they look to him to support their interests in Qom. (S NF)

The Kurds have already won both de facto autonomy under the leftist KDP and—in heavily Kurdish-populated parts of West Azarbayjan—alliance with the leftist Azarbayjani Democratic Party (ADP). The Kurdish leaders have been negotiating for formal recognition of their status by the Khomeini regime. Presently under a self-imposed cease-fire, the Kurds have threatened to resume hostilities if their demands are not met in the next few days. Any cooperation with the Azaris—or even continued conflict between Khomeini and Shariat-Madari—would further reduce the combat potential of government forces in the Kurdish areas by dividing the loyalties of Army units—which have played a secondary role in much of the fighting—and

Revolutionary Guards—who have borne the brunt of clashes with the Kurds. A delegation representing the Revolutionary Council left for Kordestan on 10 December—the same day that three Council members went on a fact finding and mediation trip to Tabriz. (TS U)

There is some evidence that the Turkomans, who occupy fertile areas to the east of the Azaris in Mazandaran Province and who have been quiescent since winning substantial self-rule in clashes earlier this year, may also be considering an uprising. Demands for formal recognition of minority autonomy are so strong throughout the minority areas that the Khomeini regime is unlikely either to resolve the conflict without making significant concessions or to exclude any minority from equal treatment. In the northwest both political and military aspects of the autonomy movement have been monopolized by groups espousing various leftist ideologies. Iranian clerical and secular leaders have consistently expressed concern over leftist activity in minority areas of the northwest and suspected Soviet involvement there partly because of the Soviet origins of the KDP and the ADP. We have no evidence of direct Soviet aid to dissident minorities. Soviet statements support the Khomeini regime and urge unity in resolving the Azarbayjan situation. (S NF NC OC)

### ***Troubled Azarbayjan***

Over the past few months, reports have indicated serious political and economic disruption in Azari-populated areas of north Iran—especially Tabriz—as well as continued disputes and clashes between residents and pro-Khomeini Revolutionary Committees or Revolutionary Guards. A “large amount” of fighting around Tabriz in June put local gendarmerie posts on alert. Unidentified groups have been raiding armories seeking weapons, and the local government ordered all “irresponsible elements” to turn in their weapons or be treated as counterrevolutionaries. This campaign has had no more success than similar disarmament appeals elsewhere in Iran. The Turkish Ambassador in Tehran, who has good contacts among the Azarbayjanis (who are ethnically Turkic), warned Ankara in early November that Shariat-Madari had “not succeeded in quieting” the Azaris and that local demands for autonomy are “potentially explosive.” He believes that other “young Turks” will assume Azari leadership if Shariat-Madari does not act decisively. (TS U)

Official investigation and mediation delegations were sent to Azarbayjan in March, June, and September. Khomeini told the delegation sent in June that it should work with the local clergy to “remove in any way you see fit” the area’s problems. His personal representative in Tabriz, Ayatollah Tabatab’i, was assassinated in early November. (U)

[redacted]

In March then Prime Minister Bazargan, an Azari, made a speech in Tabriz designed to convince the people that the new regime planned to deal with their grievances; in the past few days he again tried to pacify them, with similar lack of success. (U)

### *Leftist Activity*

We have no direct evidence of leftist instigation of, or involvement in, the disturbances in Tabriz, but accumulated reporting indicates strong leftist organizational activity throughout northwest Iran and links between dissident, autonomy-minded Azaris and like-minded Kurdish groups known to be leftist oriented. Azari dissidents have not responded completely to Shariat-Madari's directions, and they rebuffed Bazargan and the Revolutionary Council delegation who presumably had his approval. If the disturbances in the Azari areas continue, Shariat-Madari may find himself trying to control events that are increasingly inspired by autonomous, well-organized, left-leaning dissidents using his name and influence to advance their own cause—a parallel to Khomeini's relationship with the "students" at the US Embassy compound in Tehran. (TS U)

Little is known about political influence groups in Azari-populated areas; the most publicized is the Muslim Peoples Republican Party, associated with Shariat-Madari, the Azaris' spiritual leader whose power base is in Tabriz. A rival of Khomeini's Islamic Republican Party, it is well funded, well organized, and popular among the Azaris throughout Iran. (U)

The party organization may be partly exploited, however, by leftists who realize that Shariat-Madari's strong anti-Communism severely limits the overt organizing they can attempt in the area. An announcement of the revival of the ADP has been published, but subsequent information on activities associated with it by name is limited. Like its Kurdish sister party, the ADP had a symbiotic relationship with the Tudeh Party; both regional parties led short-lived independent republics under Soviet tutelage after World War II. Some old-time ADP members reappeared as members of a "Council of Azarbayjan" formed during the Islamic Revolution. (TS U)

[redacted] the ADP in a "rejectionist front" with the Kurdish Democratic Party, the Tudeh, and two other leftist groups holds "firm control over Kordestan Province and the southern sector of West Azarbayjan." The "front" is also exploiting a claimed close relationship with Shariat-Madari to mask its own leftist orientation. [redacted] 25X1C

- Recruitment of military units in the north by ADP organizers. Military and gendarmerie units reportedly supported the dissidents in Tabriz, and other units in the northwest have declared their allegiance to Shariat-Madari or to Kurdish spiritual leader Hosseini, who works with the KDP.

- Establishment of leftist “liberated areas” in East Azarbayjan, Gilan, and Mazandaran Provinces along the western and southern Caspian coasts. Gilan and Mazandaran have been characterized as strongly leftist.
- Formation of “autonomy committees” to prepare for an uprising against the central government. [redacted] believes the Soviets are behind this effort, using former “assets”—possibly ADP members—released from prison during the Islamic revolution.
- Release by an unidentified “committee” on 25 January of a demand for lifting restrictions on Azari cultural activities and permitting use of the local language in schools and the press. An extreme wing of the “committee” reportedly wants an independent state. Several Azari daily and weekly newspapers, espousing leftist ideas and Azari nationalism, as well as Azari radio programs and movies, are now available.
- Comments by Azaris to Western newsmen show they share other minorities’ desires for more autonomy, including an end to cultural discrimination; for a locally elected assembly with the power to fill top local civilian and military posts; and for increased government investment. While reflecting local desires growing out of the restrictions imposed by the Shah, the texts of the demands of both the ADP and the KDP reiterate the programs these organizations published in the 1940s.
- Activities by radical leftist groups seeking support among educated Azarbayjanis.
- Opening of a Palestine Liberation Organization branch office at Tabriz University in late April. No further reporting is available, and it may have been closed. (TS U NF NC OC)

25X1C

### *The Background*

During World War II all of northern Iran, including Azarbayjan, was occupied by the USSR. The Anglo-Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 1941 provided that British and Soviet troops should be withdrawn by 2 March 1946. The British withdrew on schedule, but the USSR refused and increased its troops from 60,000 to 75,000. Under Soviet aegis the Azarbayjani Democratic Republic had been formed in late 1945. The ADR was staffed primarily by men from Soviet Azerbaydzhan—some of them of Iranian origin—and led by a veteran Comintern agent. (C)



Heavy pressure by the United States and the United Kingdom through the United Nations forced the Soviet forces to leave in May 1946. The ADR collapsed completely in December 1946 when Iranian troops reentered Azarbayjan to supervise the approaching national elections. (C)

As many as 5,000 Soviet agents may have been left behind when the USSR withdrew and the ADR collapsed. In subsequent years there seems to have been little overt activity by these agents. An Azarbayjan Democratic Radio broadcasted clandestinely from Baku in the 1950s, and during the same period the ADP was active. The party was the Turkish-speaking equivalent of the Persian-speaking Tudeh Communist Party. In 1959 the ADP and the Tudeh announced their amalgamation under the latter's name, but the ADP kept its separate identity within the larger body. Little has been heard about the ADP since that time. (C)

In 1970 several reports indicated that important posts in Azarbayjan were held by former members of the Tudeh Party. Iranian officials were split over whether these people had really renounced the party and Communism. In 1973 the draft program of the Tudeh Party described the ADP as the "single working class organization in Azarbayjan," with its central committee functioning as the provincial committee of the Tudeh Party. The rest of the program contained no other references to national minorities. (C)

Approved For Release 2003/08/18 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100024-3

X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/18 : CIA-RDP81B00401R000500100024-3